THE DRAMATEURS AND TOWN HALL

1913-1968

HISTORICAL MATERIALS
LAFAYETTE LIBRARY

Town Hall

THE STORY OF LAFAYETTE TOWN HALL and THE DRAMATEURS, INCORPORATED

In June 1913, shortly after it was organized, the Lafayette Improvement Club, now the Lafayette Improvement Association, decided to build a community center. After many money-raising dances and parties, the building was completed on land donated by Mr. and Mrs. Frank GHIGLIONE. On May 1, 1914, it opened with a supper downstairs and a dance upstairs. This set a pattern to last for many years.

Saturday night dances at Lafayette Town Hall became very popular. People came from all parts of the area. The Oakland, Antioch and Eastern Railroad (Sacramento Northern) provided extra trains on dance nights and waited until the last person was ready to leave at three, four or even five in the morning. In time, however, the popularity of dance parties waned and fewer events took place in Town Hall.

In the following years, the Town Hall played numerous civic roles. In addition to meetings of Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls, American Legion, Lions Club, and other civic groups, it housed, at various times, a church, a public school classroom and the library until each, in turn, moved on to new quarters. Then, for a brief period, it became famous as the home of "The Straw Hat Review."

Finally, in 1958, THE DRAMATEURS leased the building from the Lafayette Improvement Association on a year-round basis. They spent over $7,000 improving the inside of the building while the Improvement Association beautified the exterior. Once again the historic building fulfilled its founders' purpose as a community center; no longer the echo of dancing feet; now the smell of grease paint and the sound of laughter and applause. This is not only a landmark worth preserving, but it is a building still just as important and necessary to the community as when it was first built more than half a century ago. It lives in the happy memories of many thousands of men and women who have scattered all over the world. THE DRAMATEURS are pledged to save it.

THE DRAMATEURS, INCORPORATED, is a non-profit corporation organized solely for the advancement and pursuit of the dramatic arts. It is an amateur little-theater group which has operated successfully in the East Bay area for more than twenty-one years. Its beginnings go back to 1944 when a group of twenty Orinda housewives banded themselves together to produce a Christmas play for the children. Before long, the husbands got into the act and the group began presenting plays for adult or family audiences. Several of those original members are still active in the organization. In the early years, meetings and rehearsals were held in private homes; sets were constructed in workshops, barns, garages and even driveways. Performances were given in rented halls and auditoriums throughout the East Bay area. Despite these difficulties, the DRAMATEURS soon earned a reputation for excellence throughout the Bay Area.

Upon leasing the Town Hall in 1958, a new era began for the DRAMATEURS. They installed a new stage, permanent seating, and lighting and sound equipment. They promptly took advantage of the opportunities now available by producing plays previously impossible because of staging difficulties. Their new home, Town Hall, enabled them to strive for perfection in every production, and this was achieved in high degree in most. Now it was possible to stage four or five major productions a year, each running two evenings a weekend for six to eight weeks consecutively. Without doubt, in their 21 years of operation, those spent in Town Hall were their best and most productive. For example, during the 1963-64 season, they produced 5 plays and gave 57 performances before more than 6,000 persons. This was their last season of normal operation. In October, 1964, changes in local fire and building regulations required that the Town Hall be closed.

HISTORICAL MATERIALS
LAFAYETTE LIBRARY

Engineering studies indicated that it would cost approximately $30,000 to restore the Lafayette Town Hall. After considering other alternatives, the DRAMATEURS with the support and cooperation of the Lafayette Improvement Association, owners of the building, launched a fund raising drive to "Save Town Hall." They set their goal at $50,000 so that they could not only make the necessary repairs, but could also add improvements for the comfort of the audience, the quality of productions and the beauty of the historic old building.

The community responded to the drive to the extent of about $25,000, including cash and donated labor. With this, they embarked on the restoration program and found that, by doing much of the work themselves, the job could be done with a reduced amount of money. Efforts to use temporary quarters proved to be impracticable and operations had to be suspended until the Town Hall could again be occupied. They worked hard during the period of suspension, holding rummage sales, giving play-readings and other entertainment programs, and soliciting contributions. By February 1966, the first phase of the work was completed. This included the installation of a sprinkler system, fireproofing materials and the elimination of hazards due to structural defects. County and State authorities permitted the Town Hall to be re-opened upon agreement with the DRAMATEURS that there would be no undue delay in completing the renovation of Town Hall.

Since re-opening, three plays have been produced: "Bus Stop," "The Importance of Being Earnest," and "The Happy Time," all of which were successful. More than 3,000 people have enjoyed them. The Laf-Frantics have produced their annual melodrama and variety show successfully on three weekends before more than 1,100 people. The proceeds of this production were given to the "Save Town Hall Fund."

The lives of the people in this area have been enriched over the years in many ways. There are the thousands who have attended the more than 50 plays produced by the DRAMATEURS since 1954, the year Carl RASMUSSEN became their director. There are the actors, more than 350 of them, who have played more than 800 roles under his expert direction. There are the hundreds more who, though unsung, have taken part in the backstage work and in the management and production of the plays. The young people of the community have had the opportunity, and many have taken advantage of it, to get dramatic training in the School of Drama conducted at Town Hall under the capable tutorage of two members of THE DRAMATEURS. These classes have been held since 1959 and are for youngsters from 7 to 17 years of age. Using Town Hall facilities and DRAMATEUR teachers, they learn the fundamentals of drama. Many win roles in DRAMATEUR productions and all gain poise and confidence in themselves that will help them all of their lives.

More than $25,000 has been realized by organizations sponsoring DRAMATEUR plays. For several, this is the chief money raising program for their annual drives. Local restaurants get business from the many out-of-town people who come to the shows. Truly, the benefits accruing to the community are almost unlimited.

* The second and final phase of our work will cost about $16,000. This money will be spent in renovating the dressing rooms, enlarging and modernizing the restroom facilities, improving the ventilation system and landscaping the exterior. Our commitment to complete these things is a binding one, and financial help is urgently needed. We have negotiated a ten-year lease with a ten-year renewal clause which assures us and the community that we will have occupancy for a long time to come. Any contribution you make is tax deductible from both Federal and State income tax.

Make checks payable to: DRAMATEURS - Save Town Hall Fund
Mail to: Box 636, Lafayette, California

* WE ARE NOW WITHIN $4000 OF OUR GOAL (1968)

ITS HISTORY . . . . .

The DRAMATEURS is a non-profit corporation organized solely for the advancement and pursuit of the dramatic arts. Its beginnings go back more than twenty years to 1944, when twenty Orinda housewives banded themselves together to produce a Christmas play for the children. Before long, their husbands got into the act and the group began presenting plays for adult or family audiences. Several of those original members are still active in the organization. During its early years, the group held its meetings and rehearsals in private homes. Sets were built in workshops, barns, garages, and even in driveways. Performances were given in rented halls and auditoriums throughout the East Bay area. Despite these difficulties, the DRAMATEURS soon earned a reputation for excellence throughout the Bay Area.

Finally, in 1958, a new era began; the DRAMATEURS acquired a "permanent" home at the Lafayette Town Hall - - thanks to the Lafayette Improvement Association, who leased us the historic building on a year-round basis. We installed permanent seating, a new stage, and lighting and sound equipment. The DRAMATEURS lost no time in taking advantage of the opportunities now available. Plays previously impossible because of difficulties in staging were added to the repertoire. Town Hall enabled us to strive for perfection in every show -- and we achieved a high degree in most.

It also enabled us to offer more performances. Instead of occasional weekend performances, soon were presenting four or five major productions a year, each running two evenings a weekend for six to eight weeks consecutively. For example, in our last full season, we presented "Sunrise at Campobello", "Blithe Spirit", "Summer and Smoke", "Five Finger Exercise", and "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker" for a total of 57 performances to an aggregate audience of more than 6,000 people. A complete list of our productions is set forth on another page.

Since re-opening in February of 1966, we have produced "Bus Stop", "The Importance of Being Earnest," and "The Happy Time," all of which have played to enthusiastic and happy audiences totalling more than 4,000 people. Judging from the audience reaction, the acclaim of the press, and the dedication of the DRAMATEURS themselves, we are well on our way to a second twenty years of providing high quality theatrical entertainment to the Oakland - San Francisco Bay Area.

ABOUT THE TOWN HALL . . . . .

In June 1913, shortly after it was organized, the Lafayette Improvement Club, now the Lafayette Improvement Association, decided to build a community center. After many money-raising dances and parties, the building was finally completed on land donated by Mr. and Mrs. Frank GHIGLIONE. On May 1, 1914, it opened with a supper downstairs and a dance upstairs.

This set a pattern. Saturday night dances at Lafayette Town Hall became very popular and continued for many years. People came from all parts of the area. The Oakland, Antioch and Eastern Railroad (Sacramento-Northern) provided extra trains for dance nights and would wait until the last person was ready to leave at three, four, even five in the morning. In time, however, the popularity of dance parties waned and fewer events took place in the Town Hall.

In the following years, the Town Hall served numerous civic roles. In addition to meetings of Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls, American Legion, Lions Clubs and other civic groups, it housed, at various times, a public school classroom and the library until each, in turn, moved on to new quarters. Then, for a brief period, it became famous as the home of the "Straw Hat Review."

Finally, in 1958, the DRAMATEURS leased the building from the Lafayette Improvement Association on a year-round basis. The DRAMATEURS spent over $7,000 improving the inside of the building and the Improvement Association beautified the exterior. Once again, the historic building fulfilled its founders' purpose as a community center; no longer the echo of dancing feet, now the smell of grease paint and the sound of laughter and applause.

The Lafayette Improvement Association acts as spokesman for over 26,000 residents of Lafayette, an unincorporated area. It represents their interests with respect to roads, flood control, schools, Fire Districts, Parks and Recreation, zoning, etc. It helped plan and bring to fruition a program of beautification of the community. We are indebted to them for their support and cooperation.

The Association's Directors for 1966-67 are: Richard A. MALOTT (President), George W. WASSON (Vice-President), Mrs. Ruth DIER (Secretary), Bob VINCENT (Treasurer), Mrs Jeanne T. CORY, Lee B. DAVENPORT, Philip E. DIAMOND, Ralph GRADY, Fred HOTES, Mrs. R. H. LOCKEY, Robert MC FARLAND, Robert J. MILLER, C. H. PEDERSEN, Howard A. SMITH, William H. SOMERTON, Andrew H. YOUNG and R. D. BUFFINGTON.

HISTORICAL MATERIALS
LAFAYETTE LIBRARY

ITS ORGANIZATION . . . . .

When the DRAMATEURS incorporated in 1954, the organizational framework then established still governs its operations. Many believe that this structure has been the key to our unparalleled strength and success.

First are the members. Membership is open to anyone desiring to participate in the activities of the group. Annual dues are $10. Membership provides voting privileges, invitations to a special Preview of each show, preferential consideration in auditions, and the opportunity to work on technical committees in our productions. We now boast a membership of around 100 — from as far away as Santa Rosa, San Francisco, Livermore, Martinez, Concord, Berkeley, Richmond, and Walnut Creek, as well as Lafayette, Orinda, and other adjoining communities.

Second are the technical committees. The backbone of the organization is the work of the technical staff. For every person acting, at least 10 are required for management and back-stage work. Members are expected to serve on at least one of these committees; most serve on several.

Third is the Director. He is the only paid employee of the group. He works with the Play Reading Committee and selects the play to be produced as well as the cast. All DRAMATEUR auditions are open to the public. Casting is not limited to members, although everything else being equal, members will be given preference.

The combination of these factors has resulted in a remarkably strong and successful organization. It costs money to operate a theater. Our average production costs are just under $1,000 each play. In addition, the DRAMATEURS' annual overhead exceeds $6,000. Yet never before our present crisis have we accepted or solicited donations nor had we any patrons. Our revenues and expenses have been so wisely administered by our governing board and business manager that we have met all operating expenses and, in addition, have spent more than $7,000 on building alterations and improvements between the time we moved into Town Hall and November 1964 when changes in local and State codes forced us to close. Others too have profited; sponsors of our shows have netted well over $25,000.

ITS DIRECTOR . . . . .

We take great pride in our Director, Carl RASMUSSEN. Twelve years ago, we first approached Mr. RASMUSSEN to direct "The Gioconda Smile". His obvious skill in directing and the success we achieved with this play caused us to immediately ask him to direct the next production, "Summer and Smoke". His talents and energy have been the cornerstone of our productions. Moreover, he has been an inspiration to the group during many difficult periods. Together, we have produced 47 plays ranging from original works of local playwrites through Broadway hits and the classics including Shakespeare - - all of them successful.

Due to the professional standards set and maintained by Mr. RASMUSSEN, the DRAMATEURS have come to represent the best in theater in the Bay Area.

. . . . . AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY.

"To entertain you" is perhaps our most obvious contribution to the community. The DRAMATEURS brings the finest in dramatic fare, ranging from the most recent New York shows to the classics. The Town Hall puts it within easy reach of the residents of Diablo Valley -- in their own backyard. At a time when the performing arts appear to be disappearing from the Bay Area, our 20 years of successful operation demonstrates the community's interest and support. Help us save Town Hall and we will continue to serve them for many years to come.

Less obvious but more important, the DRAMATEURS afford individuals the opportunity to pursue their artistic ambitions, whatever they may be. This is the raison d'etre of any dramatic group, especially an amateur one, because for those who make our shows possible, the sole reward lies in having created a play -- in the artistic achievement itself. The audience's enjoyment is not the reward; at best, it is only a measure of the artistic achievement.

All are welcome to participate and we are fortunate that a large number have done so. Since 1954, over 321 actors have participated in 47 plays; 114 women have played 274 roles and 207 men have played 377 roles. Auditions are open to the public and many roles, often leading ones, go to non-members. Furthermore, for every person acting, at least 10 people are required for management and backstage work. They come from all walks of life. Some aspire to professional careers and gain experience with us; others have had professional experience but now pursue it only as an avocation. Most, however, are housewives, merchants, teachers, and others. All bring one thing in common: an interest in the theater; and all carry away one thing: the satisfaction of creation.

The DRAMATEURS also support and enrich the community in a variety of other ways. We are particularly proud of our work with young people. Often, our plays coincide with material being studied in the schools and special performances are given for students in various classes. For example, our production of Merchant of Venice was used by teachers to supplement classroom study of Shakespeare's plays. Many children participated in our plays: The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker used more than 12 children under 16 years of age. Our current production of Romeo and Juliet is enriched by a dance scene done by young people from the Jane Brown Dance Theater. Two members of the DRAMATEURS conduct a School of Drama for young people from 7 to 17. Using the Town Hall facilities, youngsters learn drama and many win roles in our productions.

There are economic benefits, too. Local organizations who have sponsored our shows have netted over $20,000 and many rely on this for their annual money raising activity. Many planning to attend our performances eat at local restaurants beforehand. The support of local merchants is manifested by the advertising in our program.

OUR PROGRAM . . . . .

Sprinkler system and other required fireproofing and structural changes (including a margin for undiscovered defects)	$ 25,000
New floors and rest rooms	5,000
Heating and cooling equipment	6,000
New auditorium seats, lighting and other improvements	6,000
New stage floor, lighting and other equipment	3,000
Landscaping, paving and outdoor lighting	5,000
	$ 50,000

County and State authorities have permitted us to re-open the Town Hall upon the completion of the first phase of our renovation program which included sprinkler system and other required fireproofing and structural changes eliminating all hazards. This was accomplished by the expenditure of over $25,000 in funds and donated labor provided by citizens and local organizations interested in the preservation of the Town Hall and the continuation of the activities of the DRAMATEURS.

The above permission was granted, however, on our agreement that the second phase or completion of the project would not be delayed. An urgent need, therefore, exists for approximately $20,000. This must be raised in the most part by contributions from our friends and local organizations.

Your help will guarantee the continuance of good theater in the Bay Area for many years to come. We have negotiated a 10 year lease with a 10 year renewal clause with the Lafayette Improvement Association for the building.

ITS PLAYS . . . . .

1944 Christmas Indian Suit

1945 Sleeping Beauty

1946 Ladies of the Jury
Ten Nights in a Barroom
Our Town

1947 Night of January 16th
No Time for Comedy
The Whole Town is Talking

1948 The Good Bad Man

1950 Guest in the House
Three Blind Mice

1951 Junior Miss
Light Up the Sky

1952 Curious Savage
Dear Ruth
State of the Union

1953 The Women

1954 The Gioconda Smile
Summer and Smoke

1955 My Three Angels
(Summer triology:)
Gigi
The Fourposter
The Guardsman
Beautiful People

1956 Point of No Return
(Summer:)
Voice of the Turtle
The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker
Anastasia

1957 High Ground
(Summer:)
Bus Stop
Teahouse of the August Moon
Uncle Harry

1958 Anniversary Waltz
The Sleeping Prince
(Summer:)
Chalk Garden
Desk Set

<u>In our permanent home at Town Hall</u>

1958 Separate Tables

1959 The Rainmaker
The Rivals
The Happy Time
The Winslow Boy
The Hasty Heart

1960 Picnic
Barretts of Wimpole Street
Death of a Salesman
Dark at the Top of the Stairs
Look Homeward Angel

1961 Visit to a Small Planet
Roshomon
Life with Father
Mr. Roberts
Busy Martyr

1962 Silver Cord
The Caine Mutiny
The Grass Harp
Inherit the Wind

1963 Gigi
The Merchant of Venice
Stalag 17
Sunrise at Campobello

1964 Blithe Spirit
Summer and Smoke
Five Finger Exercise
The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker
Romeo and Juliet (postponed)

1966 Bus Stop
The Importance of Being Earnest
The Happy Time

OVER

LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING
THE BEST MAN

LADIES IN RETIREMENT
SEND ME NO FLOWERS
THE SUBJECT WAS ROSES
MORNING'S AT SEVEN -